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Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-2504

May 27, 2010

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The Honorable Julius Genachowski
Chairman
Federal Communications Commission
445 12th Street SW
Washington, DC 20554

Dear Chairman Genachowski:

Let me take this opportunity to express my gratitude for recently unveiling the National Broadband Plan (NBP) and also to share with you some thoughts regarding broadband Internet access in rural Missouri.

As the first of its kind, the NBP is both thoughtful and well-intended. However, in recent weeks, I have heard from rural telecommunications providers, small business owners, and residents of Missouri's Fourth Congressional District concerning proposals in the plan that might further widen the "digital divide."

Folks back home in Missouri are aware, as are you and I, that access to broadband Internet in urban and suburban areas has dramatically outpaced rural broadband deployment. Understanding the reason for this requires only a simple study of supply and demand economics. Simply put, when it comes to providing quality, affordable broadband Internet, rural companies are at a distinct disadvantage due to the geographic hurdles that are inherent in servicing rural communities.

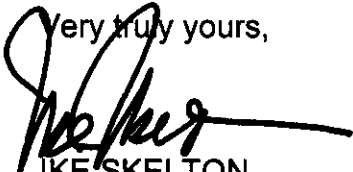
While the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) has made important strides to provide affordable broadband Internet access to unserved and underserved communities, it is important that future broadband policies do not discriminate against Americans simply based upon where they live. Technology is said to be a great equalizer and in order for residents in my District to truly be competitive and able to participate in our global economy, high-performance broadband Internet access is essential.

As you may know, rural America is home to over 50 million Americans. And, as I see it, this represents over 50 million opportunities to guide our nation back toward economic prosperity. Rural America can provide our nation's next generation of pioneers in math, science, health care, and technological innovation. However, we leave them at a certain disadvantage if we fail to provide competitive access to information and the marketplace.

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As the Federal Communications Commission and the Congress debate telecommunications policy in the days ahead, I ask for your cooperation in seeking solutions to the unique problems in rural America and that you work to diminish the gap between those who have access to the latest technologies in our country and those who do not. Let us not miss the 50 million opportunities that rural America can provide.

Again, thank you for your work on this most important issue. With kind regards, I remain

Very truly yours,

IKE SKELTON
Member of Congress

IS: ek

cc: Commissioners Copps, McDowell, Clyburn, and Baker



FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION
WASHINGTON

OFFICE OF
THE CHAIRMAN

October 13, 2010

The Honorable Ike Skelton
U.S. House of Representatives
2206 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Congressman Skelton:

Thank you for your letter expressing concern about the effect of the National Broadband Plan's (NBP) proposed universalization level of 4 Mbps on rural America. The NBP called for a Connect America Fund to enable all U.S. households to access a network that is capable of providing both high-quality voice-grade service and broadband that satisfies the National Broadband Availability Target. Recently, the Commission's Omnibus Broadband Initiative (OBI) staff released a technical paper addressing the Target speed, which I am enclosing for your review. The OBI paper details the reasons for the 4 Mbps level and notes the importance of periodic adjustments as the data supporting the Target continues to evolve.

The 4 Mbps speed is very aggressive and represents one of the highest levels in the world today for universalization, while the NBP's 100 Mbps number is based on a long-range goal. Few residential customers today subscribe to 100 Mbps service, and 4 Mbps currently is the median speed purchased by consumers. Only 6 percent of consumers subscribe to broadband service that is faster than 10 Mbps. Broadband service at 4 Mbps permits consumers to utilize its full benefits, including web browsing, e-mail, two-way video conferencing, and watching educational lectures online in standard definition. The Target speed also is "reasonably comparable" to the broadband service currently provided in urban areas, which is the standard mandated under Section 254 of the Communications Act for universalization. Cost is also a factor that needs to be considered – subsidizing universal 100 Mbps deployment today could cost as much as \$320 billion, which could increase the size of the fund to \$40-50 billion annually, and lead to a universal service fee, on average, of \$30 per month per American household.

Be assured that I am committed to making broadband affordable and attainable by all Americans, regardless of where they live or which service providers they use. I look forward to working with you and other Members of Congress as the Commission transforms its universal service policies to ensure that there will be no digital divide in our nation. Please do not hesitate to contact me if I can be of further assistance.

Sincerely,



Julius Genachowski

Enclosure